Books — and Authors

If It is Unilateral

DISARMAMENT DISASTROUS

By LINDSAY ROGERS

TWO YEARS AGO in "The Power Elite" C. Wright Mills was emotional because of his discovery that some people have more status, money and power than other people and use their advantages to advantage themselves rather than to advance the common weal (this also happens in totalitarian societies, vide, Djilas's "The New Class").

Now, as the times become more and more parlous and the great question is, as Bertrand Russell put it, whether mankind will acquiesce in its survival, Mr. Mills warns us in "The Causes of Third World War," that an elite wants to take us into war. Many would agree that there has been a good deal of shouting, stimulated by press agents who have become more important than physicians or confessors, but shouting is quite different from wanting.

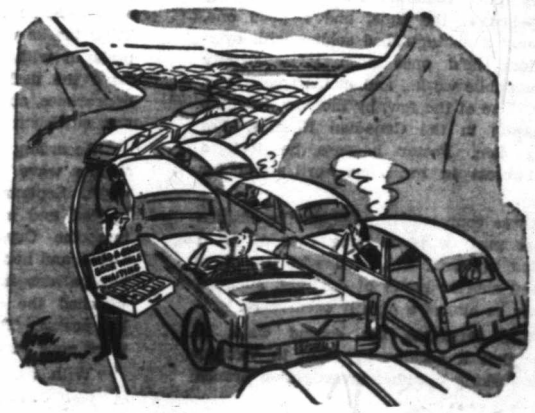
"For the first time the U.S. elite definitely includes among it executives and politicians and lawyers the war lords of Washington" ("wor lords," I may interject, who did not appear very lordly at the time of the McCarthy-Army hearing). Nevertheless, "for the politicians, the military metaphysics provides a cover under which they can abdicate the perils of innovative leadership."

Mr. Mills urges that the United States abandon "the military metaphysic"; mount a "crash program" of industrial development in backward areas; press the United Nations to provide "an international fleet of airliners for the use of scientists, intellectuals, and artists at or below cost" (why not free?), and international centres with "multilingual stenographic pools and conference rooms of various sizes"; let no more "contracts of a scientific character to any private business corporation"; stop nuclear testing, "announce the size of its present stockpile" and a schedule for reducing it; "abandon all military bases and installations outside the continental domain of the United States"; urge "European nations once more to take the initiative in world history . . . by unilaterally and immediately disarming"; scrap NATO and the Warsaw Pact (the latter, I add, is unimportant because the Kremlin controls the governments in it), and recognize China and "all other Communist-type states."

Such a facile program completely ignores the nature of the "predicament" in which we find ourselves.

In order to explain this briefly, I rely on an English historian whose writings Mr. Mills either does not know or ignores. Assume, says Herbert Butterfield, that "the Soviet group of states on the one hand and the Western group on the other are absolutely level in point of virtue and in the moral qualities of the statesmen who conduct their affairs." No saints, of course, but moderately virtuous men. The Western powers, "confronted by the Russian colossus, feel that they cannot allow the defeated Germany to be drawn into the orbit of the Communist system." The Soviet Union, on the other hand, "is ridden by the mathematically equal and opposite fear that the balance will be turned against her for all the future if Germany is enlisted in the non-Communist group."

Mr. Butterfield, who knows a whole lot more about past wars than Mr. Mills and I do, concludes that the greatest conflict in history "could be produced without the intervention of any great criminals who might be out to do deliberate harm in the world."



Master and Maniac

Poe Lives Again In Haunted Palace

ON JANUARY 19 Edgar Allan Poe was precisely 150 years old. It is fitting then that Harper should on that birthday publish Frances Winwar's "The Haunted Palace: A Life of Edgar Allan Poe," for not only is this a most comprehensive biography of Israfel, but "the Harpers" first published Poe's prose in book form. In 1838 they issued his "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." It was no great success with the American public, but in a life remarkable for its blackness the publication of this novella was a time of special brightness. Not until 1845, seven years later, did Poe become famous, and that was with the publication of "The Raven." But fame was never a guarantee of Heaven to Edgar Allan Poe.

In this, her 10th biography, Miss Winwar fashions from known source materials a meticulous biographical fabric. If her book lacks the surface brilliance of her "Oscar Wilde and the Yellow Nineties" or the stagey clash and clangor of her "Poor Splendid Wings: The Rossettis and Their Circle," it is because that brilliance, that staginess was inherent in those subjects. Poe's life, from beginning to end, was, with few intervals, a calendar of poverty, sickness, and those temporary releases: drink, dope, and the rest. He was born the child of pitiful actors; he died of despair, the kind of despair for which, like cancer, there is no cure.

If "The Haunted Palace" is monotonous, it is because Miss Winwar notes, as carefully as does a nurse on a hospital bed chart, the course of Poe's sickness. And any record of a single disease 40 years and more long, be it Poe's, his forebears,' and his relatives,' must utimately numb the beholder.

Poe was born of a drunkard and a morally frail woman. The color of his days was all but fixed before he knew their winter darkness. About his basket (did he have a cradle?) stood bad fairies magnanimous with evil gifts. The good fairy was of an ironic disposition: she gave him genius. It is in charting the impact of this gift, upon Poe and upon those whose lives, even those whose lives even momentarily, were entwined with his, that Frances Winwar excells. Like all good nurses, she does, perhaps, coddle her patient. But, then, this sick male was a most attractive man, as women throughout his life were quick to realize.

They are all here in "The Haunted Palace," those blue-stocking women, those massive-tressed girls, that wilfully sad, starry sisterhood who adored him, or whom he adored—the Helens, the Leonores, the Bernices, the Annabel Lees, the matrons who never got over being little girls, the little girls who forced themselves, for his sake, to be matrons. And which of them understood him, thoroughly comprehended the genius of him? Not a one, for, although he was, in atmosphere, and even in the content of what he wrote, more 19th-century Gothic than most of his creative contemporaries, his was a spirit which transcended the climate of that moment, that place.

Horror was his true element, primordial horror. They understood this better in France. There, he was translated widely and prayed to every morning by Baudelaire. Through the vast terrain of continental literature Poe set a fresh stream flowing: no American had ever done that before. And in all of the 110 years since his death, his spell, the spell of the literature he created, indeed invented, has never ceased to bind the popular imagination. Few Americans have done that. "The Haunted Palace" contains not one vacant chamber, for Frances Winwar has constructed this edifice out of the very being of Edgar Allan Poe.

THE STAMP PACKET

By R. M. ANGUS

FOR REAL RARITIES, THEY PAY FORTUNES

A great many philatelic celebrities have visited our shores over the years, some of them to address the Vancouver Island Philatelic Society and others just as transients.

The first I can recall was F. Hugh Vallancey of London, England, who gave a lecture on the stamps of Great Britain, illustrated by many slides. Mr. Vallancey had a collection of British stamps running into well over 100 volumes, and was also the supplier of philatelic literature from his enormous stock of this material housed in a large London warehouse.

Mr. Vallancey's lecture was held in the provincial archives with the Rev. W. W. Bolton in the chair, sometime in the mid-20s. The building housing his collection and stock of literature was hit by a "blockbuster" during the blitz and Mr. Vallancey sent me photos of the building before and after—a smoking ruin. He died during the war.

Another celebrity who lectured to our society in the Empress Hotel, was "Atherton of Honolulu," who had the world's most famous collection of Hawaiian stamps, including many copies of the famous "Missionaries" both on and off cover. He had, however, no stamps with him, but gave all who wished for one, a pamphlet with a detailed description of his stamps, duly autographed. Mr. Atherton gave his entire collection to the City of Honolulu Museum as a lasting tribute to his memory. For those who don't know them, "Missionary" stamps were printed by the early missionaries to the Sandwich Islands and are worth from $5,000 to $15,000 each. They are printed on such thin and fragile paper that the few surviving are for the most part repaired.